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CHAFEE VOTES AGAINST OIL DRILLING IN ARCTIC REFUGE

WASHINGTON, DC – U.S. Senator Lincoln Chafee (R-RI) was one of a handful of Republican senators who voted this morning to preserve the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) from oil and gas exploration.

Specifically, Chafee voted against a parliamentary motion to invoke cloture (or stop debate) on two amendments sponsored by the Senators from Alaska, Frank Murkowski and Ted Stevens, that were designed to open the Arctic Refuge to oil exploration.

Following the vote, Chafee noted his reasons for opposing these environmentally-damaging amendments. “Drilling in the Arctic Refuge is not an immediate solution to our dependence on foreign oil, nor is it a viable component of a comprehensive national energy policy. I am opposed to drilling in the Arctic Refuge because I believe there are other, more feasible options for improving efficiency and reducing national foreign oil dependence.”

“These include efforts to increase the amount of renewable fuels in our nation’s energy portfolio, to strengthen federal fuel economy standards for passenger cars, and to close the loophole that currently allows SUVs to flout these standards,” Chafee continued.

“I’m prepared to support a national energy policy that balances our energy needs with strong environmental protection. Reducing our dependence on foreign oil is a national priority, but should not come at the expense of our nation’s precious natural resources. Allowing oil exploration in this pristine coastal plain promises only short-term benefits that may irreparably damage the wildlife values and unique vitality of the Arctic Refuge,” the Senator concluded.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR)

First established by President Eisenhower in 1960, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge was created and later expanded to preserve the area’s unique wilderness and wildlife values by protecting fish and wildlife populations in their natural diversity. The 1.5 million acres of the Refuge’s coastal

plain being proposed for oil drilling is the most biologically productive part of the Refuge. The coastal plain is home to a diverse collection of wildlife that includes polar and grizzly bear populations, musk oxen, 180 bird species, and one of the largest caribou herds in North America.

Porcupine Caribou

Each year, the Porcupine Caribou herd – over 129,000 members strong – migrates 400 miles from wintering grounds in the north central Yukon to the Arctic Refuge coastal plain where they give birth to their young. In a typical year, the herd can birth up to 40-50,000 calves.

The herd returns each year to their calving grounds on the North Slope's coastal plain. A Fish and Wildlife Service report found that up to 92 percent of Porcupine Caribou calves were born on the coastal plain, with an annual average of 43 percent. A recent U.S. Geological Survey report indicated that "the Porcupine Caribou herd may be particularly sensitive to development" within the coastal plain. Calf survival rates were 19 percent lower in years when females could not reach the coastal plain.

Canadian Resistance

In 1987, the United States and Canada signed a Conservation Agreement, which recognizes the value of the Porcupine herd and the importance of protecting their birthing grounds to ensure the future sustainability of the population as a vital part of the Refuge's ecological system. In Canada, land north of the Porcupine River was withdrawn from development in 1978. The threat of oil exploration and development in coastal plain remains an item of contention between the United States and Canada and the future of the Conservation Agreement.

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